



STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

Press Release

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For Immediate Release

New Mental Health Courtroom Opens at the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH)

Governor Lincoln Chafee and District Court Chief Judge Jeanne LaFazia were among the Speakers at the Opening Ceremony. Special award Developed in Memory of Joyce Ioanes

Cranston, RI, September, 2012 – The opening of the Mental Health Courtroom at BHDDH's Adolph Meyer Building, 54 Howard Avenue in Cranston, took place on Wednesday, September 19 at 1:30 p.m. The courtroom, which originally was located in the basement of the building, re-opened on the fourth floor. The ceremony was conducted in memory of Joyce Ioanes, who passed away in February of 2007. She was a tireless advocate for the rights of the mentally ill for over 30 years.

Guest speakers included Governor Lincoln Chafee and district court Chief Judge Jeanne LaFazia. Jane Morgan, Associate Director at the Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), presented the first annual Joyce Ioanes Advocacy Award to Joyce's partner, Deb Ruggiero, a businesswoman, broadcaster and State representative for District 74, Jamestown/Middletown. In future years, BHDDH will present the annual award to individuals who most embody the passion, dedication, leadership and spirit with which Joyce Ioanes advocated for individuals diagnosed with mental illness or substance abuse. These people will meet specific criteria, including making efforts to reduce the stigma surrounding behavioral health and promoting recovery.

"The opening of this new courtroom, reaffirms the State of Rhode Island's commitment to the civil rights of individuals who have mental illness," said Craig Stenning, Director of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals. "Individuals with mental illness will be afforded due process protections in an environment that confirms our Department's commitment to assuring that they are treated with dignity and respect. We are also here to honor Joyce Ioanes as the recipient of the first Annual Advocacy Award which will be known as the Joyce Ioanes Advocacy Award. She zealously advocated for her indigent clients involved in civil mental health proceedings."

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“Every Friday since 1975, confidential mental health court has been held in the basement of the Adolph Meyer building or at a community psychiatric facility. Just as we have taken the stigma of mental illness out of the darkness and into the sunlight at our Recovery Rally, today we are finally here, celebrating the opening of a new courtroom on the fourth floor and thanking members of the judiciary for their continued commitment to the mentally disabled.”

“I am proud of the fact that Rhode Island supports necessary social services for the most vulnerable in our population,” said Governor Chafee. “I applaud the efforts of everyone involved to assure that these individuals have the same rights and freedom as everyone in the State.”

"It was not that long ago that people with mental illness or developmental disabilities were too often misunderstood, unrecognized, or even worse, ignored. Many entered the criminal justice system and were incarcerated simply because society did not know what else to do with them or where else to put them," said Chief Judge LaFazia. "The Mental Health/Civil Commitment Calendar is perhaps one of the most challenging calendars handled by District Court Judges. When we look at this calendar, we see just how fragile we, as human beings, can be. While Rhode Island's Mental Health Law is progressive in its ability to balance liberty interests with the need for both treatment and public safety, we know that we must continually strive to be better."

“Joyce Ioanes was an amazing lawyer, but a most amazing person who treated those she represented with respect and dignity,” said Representative Deb Ruggiero, “Joyce’s spirit will live on in this courtroom through those who continue her work to protect the rights and liberties of the mentally ill in our state.”

About the Rhode Island Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals.

BHDDH is committed to assuring access to quality services and support for Rhode Islanders with developmental disabilities, mental health and substance abuse issues and chronic, long-term medical and psychiatric conditions. In addition to planning for the development of new services and prevention activities, the department’s mission includes addressing the stigma attached to these disabilities.

About Joyce Ioanes

Joyce Ioanes graduated from Dunbarton College in Washington, D. C. She received her masters degree in psychiatric social work from Simmons College and earned her law degree from Suffolk University. She was a civil libertarian, compassionate mentor, and spirited champion for the rights for those who were mentally ill.

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